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For immediate release

Ouachita's Elrod Center for Family and Community celebrates 22 years of service, honors namesakes

By Rachel Moreno

March 1, 2019

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ARKADELPHIA, Ark. – Ouachita Baptist University's Ben M. Elrod Center for Family and Community hosted its annual Elrod Family Foundation board meeting on Wednesday, Feb. 13, and celebrated 22 years of both the center and foundation. Faculty, staff and student volunteers met with board members to share personal testimonies about the continuing impact of the center's community service programs.

This year marked the first board meeting following the deaths of both Dr. Ben Elrod, Ouachita's 13th president from 1988-98 and the creator of the foundation, and his wife, Betty Lou. The Elrods passed away in the fall of 2018.

"Ben Elrod had many legacies here, but [the Elrod Family Foundation] is certainly a wonderful legacy; I'm glad to see we are still benefiting from it," said Ouachita President Dr. Ben Sells. "In that spirit, I want us to do nothing else than steward well what was begun, and the fund that was given, for the programs to carry on, and that we are going to celebrate today."

In Dr. Elrod's absence, and to continue the yearly reflection on the original intent for the establishment of the Elrod Center, Dr. Sells proceeded to read the statement of purpose and mission written by Dr. Elrod. His final statement reads: "The four great loves of my life have been God, family, Ouachita and the church. My prayerful hope is that this foundation may contribute significantly to the well-being of all men."

"We knew this day was going to come. Dr. Elrod knew this day was going to come," said Ian Cosh, vice president for community and international engagement and director of the Elrod Center. "And part of what he wanted to happen was that this center would continue to be a carrier of his values and a place into which he would invest, which would then project into the future to do good, not just now, but until the Lord returns."

"Our programs [at the Elrod Center] are designed to give students a quality experience of service that we then hope would be part of their life and be part of the fabric of what they wish to do, and that they'll go

out and bless others in the future.” Cosh continued. “But, also, we want to be good neighbors. We want to be able to bring the resources of the university and not just benefit the needs of our students, but also focus on the needs outside of ourselves in our surrounding communities.”

Judy Duvall, associate director of the Elrod Center, reported that TranServe – the center’s volunteer service hours program – received over 50,000 logged service hours from Ouachita students, faculty and staff for 2018. “For a small university these numbers always amaze me,” Duvall said. “It’s really remarkable, and this is just students, faculty and staff that report the numbers.”

Fifteen student volunteers, faculty and staff members went on to share their experiences serving through Elrod Center programs. Several of the programs that were highlighted included:

Big Brothers/Big Sisters: Laura Beth Warner, a junior English and Christian studies/Christian ministry double major from Benton, Ark., represented the Big Brothers/Big Sisters program and its leadership team. The program pairs Ouachita students with a child from the community and gives the student the opportunity to be a mentor and leader for the child. “The other day, we heard a story about one of our ‘littles’ who had been able to grow to trust her ‘big’ so much that she came to her and said she needed a tutor in math; she trusted her to help with her school,” Warner said.

“It’s been really cool for me to be part of this program and see that there are college students in our college community that are willing to reach out and disciple the younger generation,” Warner continued. “Just seeing that my peers are willing to be a part of this ministry has really been a blessing.”

ElderServe: Torey Harrison, a senior speech communication major from Roland, Ark., represented ElderServe. This program connects Ouachita students with senior adults in the Arkadelphia community. The pair form a friendship over the course of a college semester by meeting once a week, mainly just to visit. Harrison, who has been involved in the program for three years, started visiting with her friend, Betty, at a local nursing home even before she realized the Elrod Center offered the ElderServe program.

“We have many fun memories together,” Harrison said. “We’ve laughed together, we’ve cried together. I actually learned to play guitar so we could sing old hymns together – that’s one of our favorite things to do. But Betty also loves to have her nails painted, so we do that, too.

“I thought, by doing this program, I would be the one that was making Betty’s day by going to see her every week,” she said, “but it’s always her making my day.”

TaxServe: Christian Hickingbotham, a sophomore business administration major from Little Rock, Ark., represented TaxServe, a program that trains Ouachita student volunteers to help community members fill out their tax returns. Hickingbotham reported that, in 2017, the program consisted of two Ouachita student volunteers and one student from another university, but that it has since grown to six Ouachita student volunteers. “We spend the entire fall semester meeting once a week and doing tax cases together,” Hickingbotham said. “We learn how to read W-2s and how to interpret forms.”



"We are lucky enough that we get to do this in the Elrod Center, just down the hall," he said. "It's fun to see because these people don't understand and ask, 'Why would you want to sit here for one hour and go through all these forms, go through all these questions, that you're getting nothing for?' It certainly has reminded me of the importance to just give back."

Tiger Serve Day: Davis Wadley, a senior social justice studies and business administration double major from Batesville, Ark., represented Tiger Serve Day. The semi-annual community service event sends hundreds of Ouachita students, faculty and staff to pre-determined locations in Clark County and the surrounding area that are in need of volunteer workers to perform service projects. "Basically we are doing things like mowing yards, raking up leaves, cutting down limbs, trimming bushes, washing cars, cleaning the inside of houses," Wadley said. "Usually, we're providing a way for people who can't do this for themselves."

"Another thing I love about it is that what 800 students, faculty and staff can do in a day, it would take one person a whole year to accomplish," he added.



Tutoring: Leigh Anne McKinney, assistant director of the Elrod Center and coordinator of public school initiatives, gave a report on the impact of the Elrod Center's tutoring programs in the local schools. "We've been offering a couple of tutoring programs on public school campus for almost 22 years now," McKinney said. "At the beginning of the fall semester, I got a chance to sit down with a few of our principals, teachers, facilitators, and just ask them for their insight of the relevance of our programs on public school campuses."

McKinney learned that the Elrod Center's America Reads, America Counts and Peake Partnership tutors were being included in some students' Individual Education Plans, the reports and chains of communication between parents and their schools to evaluate where students are in their studies and reflect their progress. "We talk with our tutors a lot about the fact that what we do is not always

measurable, so this spoke to the fact that what our students are doing actually matters,” she said.



Other programs represented were Backyard Bible Club, Healthy Relationships Week, Kluck Service Enrichment Grants, Monticello Children's Home, Pan Harmony community steel band, Special Olympics, Thanksgiving Baskets and TranServe.

"Every year we look so forward to this, and every year we are so blown away by your reports and by what you're doing," Cindy (Elrod) Stroud told the volunteers. "It's just one of the best days of the year for our family; it's inspiring. I thank you for your time, your effort and your heart for others."

For more information on the Elrod Center or any of these programs, visit www.obu.edu/elrod or contact the center at (870) 245-5320.

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